

Sweden in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Report

11 - 15 September 2014



Camberwell Beauty



Common Cranes



Forest lake in Bergslagen



Water Rail

Report and images by Daniel Green



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Day 1

Thursday 11th September

The group arrived in the early afternoon at small Västerås airport. Just 15 minutes away, we stopped at a small, newly restored lake - Frövisjön. It is harvest season and a combine harvester was attracting a little crowd of 16 Common Buzzards and 2 Marsh Harriers... there must be an abundance of voles in the field. By the lake a female/juvenile Hen Harrier was hunting. On the lake we found a Little Grebe, together with some Wigeon, Teal and Gadwalls. Our first two Cranes of the trip were standing on a little island in the lake, and plenty of Ruffs, Lapwings and Starlings were around too. We enjoyed the tranquillity of the countryside and a good welcome coffee and sandwich before heading on.

A short stop by Lake Gnien offered two Little Stints and a Ruff. We had actually hoped for some good raptors as Pallid Harrier had been seen here recently...a Kestrel and some Common Buzzards is what we got instead! A stop by a felling in the forest produced two Black Woodpeckers, calling and flying by right towards us. Stunning birds!

We checked in at Salbohedsgarden B&B and headed back out again for a short evening session - a tranquil evening down by the Lake Fläcksjön to enjoy the sunset. A flock of Long-tailed Tits passed through the willows briefly. An adult White-tailed Eagle suddenly appeared and flew really close by. Flocks of Greylag Geese were coming and going from the lake where a few Whooper Swans and some Great-crested Grebes were swimming. The moon rose and a flock of at least 25-30 Cranes came flying past. Most Cranes seem to have left this area for the season already or perhaps they have chosen a different roosting site right now – it can vary. As we arrived at the lake at dusk and stopped to take pictures of the rising full moon, another 50 or so more Cranes came flying above us, probably heading for the forest bogs nearby. Just a little taste of what was to come... because there would be many, many Cranes to enjoy over the next few days!

Day 2

Friday 12th September

There were Marsh Tits and Tree Sparrows on the feeders around breakfast this morning, but we headed out to the Nutcracker feeding station just a few miles away. As we waited for the crackers to arrive we spent time with close views of Willow Tits, Coal, Marsh and Crested Tit, Great-Spotted Woodpeckers and a Red Squirrel came to collect what the Nutcrackers don't eat.

Perhaps they were busy collecting nuts from the natural crop of Hazelnuts so we continued down the road where we could overlook a bigger clearing. Here we indeed found the Nutcrackers, shuttling back and forth between feeding and hoarding areas. Redpolls, Mistle Thrush, Dunnock, Wren, were other birds that were about too, and it also sounded like quite a few Cranes were calling from down by the lakeside behind us.

Our next target for the day was Hjälstaviken. We headed out towards the watchtower by the lake and we could easily spot the first Lesser White-fronted Geese, at least 7 birds, all with white foreheads. These are among the tiny population, less than 100 individuals remain, of this rare little Goose. Despite a lot of effort with captive-breeding and reintroduction, the Lesser White-fronts have declined in the last few years. It is the rarest Goose in Europe and some of the very few last remaining, totally wild, birds. As we walked on, a male Bluethroat was jumping up on the fence by the track, showing its orange and blue breast. From the platform by the lake we enjoyed the masses of birds; 3,700 Barnacle Geese, 5,000 Bean Geese and 7,000 Greylags were recently counted here. An impressive and sudden move from the many Barnacles right in front of us, and soaring, trumpeting, flocks of Common Cranes in the sky above us added to the experience.

On the far side of the lagoon, many, many Bean Geese were standing by the water and amongst them was one Pink-footed Goose. Dunlins and Ringed Plovers appeared among the many hundreds of Ruffs and Lapwings that inhabit the mudflats out in the water. From time to time, they got flushed by Peregrines - with no less than 3 birds - all juveniles - hunting and interacting with each other. As we got up to start our walk back, a young male made serious attempts to catch a Ruff singled out from the flock. The hunt went up and down in a dramatic chase, and finally the Ruff appeared to get away, and instead the Falcon charged into a flock of Starlings and disappeared in the grass, probably finishing off its catch on the ground. A juvenile Hen Harrier chased around with a Marsh Harrier over the reed beds.

After dinner we set off out to look for Pygmy Owls. Despite a beautiful evening they didn't appear. A stop at a site to hear Red Deer in rut was rewarding, with many bucks roaring as we stepped out to gaze at the stars and the rising full moon. It is a such strong sound that they produce, it reminded us of lions, howler monkeys or the sounds you can imagine dinosaurs made...magnificent and atmospheric!

Day 3

Saturday 13th September

The feeders at the hotel were hosting Great-spotted Woodpecker, Tree Sparrows, Marsh and even Crested Tit today. We started our journey westwards for our next destination. First we took a little look at a burnt area, where an enormous forest fire took 150 km² of forest this summer. It's impressive and terrible at the same time to see the blackened ground and pine trees totally burnt or still standing but with yellow needles. We could also see life starting to come back with some green bracken showing up from the ashes, and knew that next year this might be a haven for Black and Three-toed Woodpeckers which felt reassuring.

In Färna Ekopark we struggled with the forest birds today and only one Black and one Green Woodpecker were seen, despite plenty of good habitat. Crossbills were flying over with some Siskin, Long-tailed Tits, Willow and Crested Tits moving in the forest. Ten Black-throated Divers appeared at the picnic spot by a lake and we followed them as they approached and came into better light for us - stunning birds, still in immaculate summer plumage, actively fishing in the crystal clear water. Before we started our transfer down to the lowlands again, a short coffee break by another lake produced two more Black-throated Divers.

In the afternoon we arrived at the Kvismare Valley and as we checked in at our hotel the calls of trumpeting Cranes filled the air, with several flocks soaring on the thermals. We headed out straight after an early dinner and were met by a field full of Cranes just by the roadside; several of them were family groups with young. The influx of Cranes towards the roosting site was starting and apparently thousands were flying in. However, we wanted to photograph them against the sunset, so we moved to another field, where hundreds of Cranes were feeding and we were in a better position. It proved to be a good move and soon they started to pour in right in front of the best evening sky. A lot of Geese - mainly Bean Geese were flying the same route. Only when we started to get a little bit cold did we head back "home". At the hotel we lit the Moth lamp and spent a while listening to the 2 or 3 Tawny Owls that were calling repeatedly in the area just outside.

Day 4

Sunday 14th September

In the morning we realised that the night must have been too clear to produce any major Moths, but a couple of species were identified, including a Figurer 88, an Orange Underwing and a Carpet. At 6am we headed out down to the marshes to pay a visit to the ringing scheme in the reed beds. Already on the path in front of us several birds were hopping about and among Reed Buntings, a male Bluethroat appeared. He was a really cocky one who chased the buntings away and offered us quite a little performance before flying into the reeds!

It was a misty morning and a lot of birds seemed to be caught in the mist nets. We tagged along with the staff going to empty them, and then stood by the ringers table to take part in the actual ringing and to get a closer look at the birds. Reed Buntings, Yellowhammers, Reed- and Sedge Warblers, and Common Whitethroat were among the first species to be ringed. Soon enough the first Bluethroat was drawn out of the "birdbag" and turned out to be a male with its lovely blue and orange breast. The next was a little less colourful so probably a female, though seemed to be an adult. These birds are the northern, mountain-breeding nominate form, also known as the red-spotted race. Despite way more than 20,000 birds ringed in Sweden, there are still no winter recoveries, so the more precise wintering grounds of the Scandinavian Bluethroats remain an enigma to science. The last bird to be ringed before we returned for breakfast was a juvenile Red-backed Shrike, a fairly fierce creature who bit the ringer repeatedly!

The mist was still like a blanket over the landscape when we set out again after breakfast. We started at a hill with old trees and bushes and we didn't have to go further than the car park to see the first interesting bird; a male Lesser-Spotted Woodpecker was feeding in a nearby Rowan tree, hanging upside down on branches and calling, even drumming a bit. It stayed around for good while and offered photo opportunities. We walked further and saw two juvenile Red-backed Shrikes among Reed Buntings by the edge of the reeds and as we approached the reeds again, we started to hear the metallic calls of Bearded Reedlings. Though we stood a bit higher on an embankment it was not so easy to spot them, but two juveniles appeared in the scope, long enough for at least some of us to see them. We got luckier at the next hide where a flock of 8 Reedlings just popped up in a small bit of reed just in front of the hide, including 2 strikingly black moustached males. The view over the lagoon Rysjön is splendid here and the light perfect as the mist finally rose. Among plenty of ducks and Geese we managed to pick out both Red-necked and Slavonian Grebes, Pintail, Shovelers, Pochards and some Greenshank. As the temperature rose, raptors were starting to soar above us and several Marsh Harriers, Common Buzzards, Hobbies and at least 2 White-tailed Eagles were showing.

We headed out to the fields to search for flocks of Cranes and raptors. On the first stop a Lapland Bunting and a Red-throated Pipit appeared, uttering their diagnostic calls but without showing more than a fly-by. We enjoyed a wrap and a cold beer overlooking the landscape with some hundreds of Cranes in front of us.

Tonight we walked down along the canal to another hide, closer to one of the two roosting sites for the Cranes. Along the way we stopped for a closer look at some impressive gatherings of Dragonflies (Darters) on a couple of old trees when a flock of about 10 Long-tailed Tits appeared right next to us. They lingered for a good while and several of us even got some pictures of these normally constantly moving birds. These are as pretty as they come, being the Scandinavian race with the all-white head.

The Crane influx here was even more spectacular than yesterday and we also saw a lot of Bean Geese on the grasslands in front of us, Ruffs, Lapwings and Common Snipes flew around, plus Reed Warblers foraging in the reeds below us. Two impressive adult White-tailed Eagles came in to land in a tree not too far away from us. As dusk started to fall we enjoyed a last gaze through the Crane masses, and two juvenile birds with a very rare white-patched plumage stood out from the crowd. When we reached the bridge we stood in awe in front of the evening sky that has deepened from orange to a dark red. Two Beavers swam in the canal beneath us, and suddenly a Long-eared Owl flew by against the bright sky. At the same time the thousands of Cranes on the roosting site behind us were calling loudly and it sounded like they might have trouble, maybe with the fox we saw there earlier this evening. Many of them started to head our way and even fly in just above us in the dusk. Magical! We reflected over the fact that every evening of the trip had been calm, clear and with a beautiful sunset and a colourful sky. Some of the group heard the Tawny Owls back at the hotel after the final roll call.

Day 5

Monday 15th September

This morning a few more interesting Moth species were found on the canvas, including a Merveille du Jour. Cranes were trumpeting all around the B&B this morning and they seemed to feed on the very surrounding fields. On our way back towards the airport we made a short stop at the Oset nature reserve where a footpath leads around a grazed area with some small, shallow lagoons that can sometimes attract good birds. It was a bit slow today, but Bullfinches and a Water Rail were calling. A Dunlin, a Golden Plover, a couple of Grey Herons, and a flock of eight Ringed Plovers were what we got here today, and we thoroughly enjoyed our landlady's rich chocolate cake that she baked for us with the morning coffee! We made a final stop by a church ruin to break the transfer and have our sandwiches before it was time to depart...

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Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common Names	Scientific name	September				
			11	12	13	14	15
1	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>			12		
2	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
3	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>				1	
4	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus subruficollis</i>	1				
5	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>				1	
6	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		1		13	2
7	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓		11	✓
8	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>				5	
9	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
10	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Ander brachyrhynchos</i>		1			
11	Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>		5000	500	2000	✓
12	Lesser White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser erythropus</i>		14			
13	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>					✓
15	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
16	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	2			4	
19	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>				1	
21	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				15	
22	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				2	
23	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	7				
24	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1	1	✓	1
25	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	1	1			
26	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	1			4	
29	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
30	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		2		✓	
31	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		3			
32	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>				✓	
33	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				H	H
34	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓			✓	
35	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	60+	500+	12,000	12,000	✓
36	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		3			8
37	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>					1
38	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	500+	✓	600+	✓
39	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		3			1
40	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	2				
41	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	1	300		200	✓
42	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			H	5	
43	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓		✓	
44	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	1				
45	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
46	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓		✓	
47	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓			

	Common Names	Scientific name	September				
			11	12	13	14	15
48	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
49	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia feral</i>	✓	✓		✓	
50	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>				1	
51	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		✓	✓	✓	
52	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	2		1+1	H	
53	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
54	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>				1	
56	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				✓	✓
57	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>				✓	
59	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓		✓	
60	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>				1	
61	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓		✓	
62	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergii</i>				1	
64	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓		
65	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓		✓	
66	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>		2		3	
68	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	
70	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
71	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓	✓	
72	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓		✓	
73	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓		
74	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>				✓	
75	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				✓	
76	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>				1	
77	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				✓	
78	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				✓	
79	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
80	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	✓	✓	✓		
81	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
82	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓	✓		
83	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓		
84	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Coat Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		✓			
86	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	10+	
87	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmictus</i>				8	2
88	Common Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓			
89	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
90	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>				3	
91	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>		✓			
94	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
97	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus comix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
98	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common Names	Scientific name	September				
			11	12	13	14	15
99	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>				✓	
100	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
101	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>				H	
102	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>			✓		
103	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓		
104	Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>		✓	✓		
105	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
106	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>					H
107	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			H		
108	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
109	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓

Moths & Butterflies

1	Figure 88	<i>Diloba caeruleocephala</i>			1	1	
2	Merveille de Jour	<i>Dichonia aprilina</i>					1
3	Lesser Orange Underwing	<i>Noctua comes</i>			1	1	
4	Pine Carpet	<i>Pennithera firmata</i>			1	1	
5	Barred Sallow	<i>Tiliacea aurego</i>					1
6	Vapourer	<i>Orgyia antiqua</i>			3+		
7	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>				1	
8	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>				1	
9	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓			
11	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓			✓	

Dragonflies

1	Brown Hawker	<i>Aeshna grandis</i>	✓	✓		✓	
2	Moorland Hawker	<i>Aeshna juncea</i>			1		
3	Blue Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>			1	1	
4	Darter sp	<i>Sympetrum sp</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Black Darter	<i>Sympetrum danae</i>			✓	✓	

Mammals

1	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>					
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓			
3	European Elk	<i>Alces alces</i>	✓				
4	Red Fox	<i>Vulpe vulpes</i>		✓		✓	
5	Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
6	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		1			
7	Forest Mouse	<i>Apodemus flavicollis</i>		2			



Cranes at Sunset